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MEXICO REVISITED

by Frank C. Hanighen

That day, almost twenty years ago, an antiquated train bumped me slowly down the plateau of Mexico southward. An armored car manned by half a hundred shabby soldiers was coupled behind.

General Obregon had recently been assassinated and religious war flared, with attacks on railroad trains a disturbing feature. Another kind of conflict, class warfare, marked by strikes and seizure of haciendas, made property owners tremble. Ambassador Dwight Morrow toiled to modify the Mexican Government's confiscation of subsoil rights.

En route, I gaped through the windows at station crowds of Indians, many of them conspicuously diseased and undernourished. After arriving in the Mexico City station, American-like I smiled at the decrepit Ford taxi which precariously took us through street traffic composed largely of other decrepit Model T's, not to mention donkey trains and a few flocks of turkeys. At the hotel, I was grateful for the second class plumbing; and for the haven I fancied it offered against anarchists and anti-American revolutionaries.

Three weeks ago, a luxurious DC-6 took me swiftly (over-night service from Washington) right past Popocatepetl, with a view of green lava winking in the crater, down to an airport no better, no worse, than most of those north of the border. I put up at a modern skyscraper hotel after a ride in a Buick taxi as new as any in Washington.

As an American I felt welcome this time. The newspapers featured a veritable inter-American love feast of the day before. West Point and Chapultepec cadets had jointly held a memorial on the spot where just a century ago General Winfield Scott had defeated Santa Anna, thereby ending an American imperialistic adventure.

In the lobby, an American machinery salesman remarked happily about the new Mexican oil deal with a Louisiana concern, "I think I'm going to sell some drilling equipment". Times indeed have changed.

II

The ideological climate, it seems, has changed with them. A New York intellectual, who had been studying Mexican social and economic

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conditions all summer, told me: "Liberals here admit that they underestimated the progress which the Indian peasant could make under land distribution and that they overlooked Mexican dependence on the international economic system. Too many peasants simply raise enough to keep themselves. As a result, Mexico has to buy corn and wheat in the U. S. at a time when dollars are scarce.

"As for the Labor movement, it looks like a fraud to me. Labor union leaders scream anti-capitalist slogans, but sell out their members for whatever bribes the employers will give them." An American business man related how he had settled a strike in his plant: "The Union agent offered to call off the strike if I gave him 15,000 pesos. I offered 1000. We settled for 7,000." The name of the union leader, I noticed, was one often lyricized by the New York Daily Worker.

'Twas a far cry indeed from two decades ago, when American intellectuals arrived armed with the works of Ernest Gruening and Carleton Beals; thrilling to the plans for division of land among peasants; deriving inspiration from the blueprints of the economic planners; their hearts beating quickly at the sight of the red and black strike banners (nowadays virtually a collector's item).

Perhaps more symbolic of the turning wheel of events was the pathetic figure of Victor Serge. I met Serge, one of the few surviving old Bolsheviks, purged by Stalin in 1934, rescued from a concentration camp by Andre Gide in 1936, now cooling his heels in exile in Mexico City. A sadder and wiser man, he sardonically follows the antics of Mexican Stalinists, traces the corruption, as he calls it the "rottenness" of the Communists and fellow traveller cliques in the Mexican capital. He sat -- insisted on sitting -- with his face to the door. He knows what happened to Trotsky; he himself has been threatened. He wants to emigrate to the U. S., but while Communists and fellow travellers get visas, he, like other ex-Commies who have become anti-Communist, has no pull in the State Department.

Anita Brenner has written an obituary of the Mexican art movement which arose in the Twenties, with Diego Rivera, Orozco, Siqueiros, et al. But the artistic creative spirit is not yet dead in Mexico, judging by one film I saw, exhibited in a new, large and tastefully decorated movie house in Mexico City. La Perla is a pleasing combination of good acting, finely-handled atmosphere, excellent direction and truly unforgettable photography. Its story of a Mexican pearl diver and his wife should prove a drawing card in American cinema houses.

Friends complained that too many beautiful examples of Spanish baroque architecture had been razed to erect ugly modern buildings.

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That is possibly so, although I received a different impression about Mexico's preservation of national monuments. Sixteen years ago I first visited Taxco, which is to Mexico what Bruges is to Belgium. Despite many new villas and hotels, the old baroque Borda church continues to glow like a gem, the lovely plazuela is the same, the little old streets clamber over the mountainside and the ensemble remains unimpaired in its beauty.

III

There seems to be a distinct element of expectancy in the bright, clear air of the Mexican capital. It springs not only from the eager talk of American salesmen who perennially scent new business, but also from numerous signs of a gargantuan goods-appetite among the people.

Sears, Roebuck and Company early this year opened a store in Mexico City, a replica of their establishments at home. It has been doing a thriving business. I talked to the manager, who dwelt on the failure of Mexican merchants to understand quick turnover and its relation to cheaper prices. The Sears idea seems to be catching on, for Montgomery Ward is rumored to be entering the Mexican field.

One night in Taxco, I watched a burro caravan clatter mysteriously down a narrow medieval lane, like a scene from Cervantes. Two of the burro drivers, in wide sombreros and blankets, swung electric torches. Those objects keep flashing in my mind. Has the desire for modern goods breached the traditional resistance of the Indian culture, which so long rebuffed that of Spain?

If so, Mexico would be on the way to another era of reconstruction. The era of Porfirio Diaz cracked open the old colonial feudal facade. However great its evils, the Diaz regime developed the country in many ways. Perhaps another push forward is gathering momentum.

Be that as it may. American business men, I thought, displayed a new spirit. One observed: "The days of foreign exploitation are over. Today, we must go into partnership with Mexicans, divide the gains and loses with them, in the building up of the country. But I think the Mexicans realize -- what they did not see during the revolutions -- that we have a contribution to make which they badly need."

The newspapers provided an illustration of the latter remark. Dispatches from the rich Poza Rica oil region described how the Government oil monopoly had to bring down from Texas an oil fire fighting outfit to extinguish a dangerous conflagration. Newspaper editorials in Excelsior and Universal used this case as a lesson that Mexico needs foreign know-how and capital, if it is to solve its economic problems.

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Such a solution may be easier because of the new character of the present government. The same issues of the newspapers kept referring, as they do these days, to "Lic. [lawyer] Aleman". The title indicates a significant change from the past when every President was a General. American observers long in Mexico dwell much on this new development.

Not only was Mexico's central government usually headed by a military man; but the various regions of the Republic, never closely knit together, were the preserves of local war lords. If a President-General could gather enough support from the regional military chief, he felt himself pretty secure in power. The trend has been away from that system for some time and now culminates in "Lic." Aleman's civil regime. Mexicans now have some hope that economic and political developments may proceed without pronunciamentos and coups.

The new Government of lawyers, however, will not tamper much with the law of the land. The revolutionary Constitution of 1917, clear-sighted American observers predict, will not be changed. There probably will be deals by which American firms will be employed to drill oil wells. But the title to the subsoil riches will stay in the hands of the State. Labor unions may languish, but woe to the gringo employer who trys to defy the Labor laws. And banish the thought that the old hacienda system will again be tolerated. In short, the Government will not and cannot turn back the clock to 1910.

There's a reason. In 1928, I travelled to Mexico in company with a distinguished American opthalmologist. From the border southward and during my stay, he was professionally fascinated; I was humanly shocked. The endemic trachoma left countless horrible examples of blindness and eye trouble, seen in every street and public place; but today I could see no evidence of such an eye plague. Some very good humanitarian work must have been accomplished in the past two decades, for the Mexican people look healthier and happier. Despite all the economic wounds it left, the revolutionary era did much that was constructive.

The present Government of Aleman seems intent on respecting the accomplishments of reform, while seeking to eliminate the xenophobia and Bolshevist spirit of the recent past. If this middle of the road administration succeeds, it should mark a new and happier stage in the history of the "land of the Eagle and Serpent".

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Not Merely Gossip *A Supplement to* Human Events VOL. IV, NO. 41

By Frank C. Hanighen October 8, 1947

The announcement by the Kremlin that a nine-country Communist drive has been formed to defeat "Western imperialism" and "monopoly capitalism" is believed to mean that Moscow is seeking to tighten up and re-invigorate its fifth column weapons in the struggle against U. S. opposition, as manifested in the Truman doctrine and the Marshall "plan". The inclusion of two non-satellites, France and Italy, in the new "information bureau", underlines the bitter struggle being waged in those countries between Communist elements and opposing democratic forces.

Perusal of the text of the Moscow announcement reveals that the Soviet venom is especially directed at Right Wing Socialists -- a point not sufficiently stressed by commentators. Socialist Premier Ramadier, in France, and those elements in his party opposed to totalitarianism, constitute at present the most stubborn obstacle to the maneuvers of Stalin's fifth column in France. And in Italy the anti-Soviet Socialist leader, Saragat, similarly prevents the Communist Togliatti from winning over that part of the working class which follows Marxist, but anti-Moscow, leaders. The emphasis -- and violent phrasing -- bestowed on Right Wing Socialists at once pays tribute to their strength and lays stress on the necessity of destroying the Social Democratic movement.

In a wider sense, the Moscow announcement is an effort to smooth over the contradictions and nationalistic difficulties of its fifth column efforts in France, Italy, and among the satellites. Just as Hitler ran into trouble in 1941 and thereafter, trying to reconcile the conflicts between his satellites, so Moscow is now similarly plagued. The omission of the German Communists in the nine-country setup is significant and revealing. If the German Communists, with their demands for return of lost German territory, had been included, then the Polish and Czech Communists, jealous of acquired German territory, would have been offended. And so would the French Communists now beating a nationalistic drum.

Finally, it may be said that some observers view this Comintern development less as a drive to prevent implementation of the Marshall "plan" than as a challenge to Washington to try to implement it. According to this line of reasoning, Moscow would like to see Washington try to extend massive foreign aid, under the Marshall plan; Moscow thinks that such aid would impose an intolerable strain on American resources, and on the stability of our economy, which would hasten an internal American crisis. Certainly the contradictions in this country of, on the one hand, aid for abroad, and on the other, "the fight against inflation" has become too clear for anyone to discount.

One postscript to the above discussion of the Moscow announcement should be made. On the morrow of its publication, many American commentators rushed into print with the "discovery" that the Comintern had been "revived". The incredible naivete of such a view bears witness to the continuing lack of understanding of Communist tactics and strategy. As the HUMAN EVENTS publication Blueprint for World Conquest showed, the Comintern was never really dissolved, despite Stalin's publicity stunt of "dissolution" in 1943. The Canadian spy trial produced indisputable proof that it had never ceased to function.

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We learn from reliable sources that the President was outraged by the article on him in the Moscow Literary Gazette under the by-line of Gorbatov. Mr. Truman is accustomed to Republican attacks on his "Prendergast past" and on his former business career. But a contemptuous article like that by Gorbatov, coming from a

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foreigner and a Russian, apparently was too much. Truman's anger is believed to have considerably exacerbated the diplomatic relations between the two countries last week.

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On October 1, President Truman announced important promotions and changes in the air force -- the true significance of which has so far not been explored in the public prints. Seven major generals were promoted to the rank of lieutenant general, and one lieutenant general, Hoyt Vandenberg, was made a four star, full general. While General Vandenberg has long been esteemed by the General Staff and slated for promotion, it is believed by many that his elevation at this time was in part due to political motives: Truman was desirous of paying a courtesy to the General's uncle, Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who has co-operated so closely with White House foreign policy.

The most significant aspect, however, of the Air Corps communique was seen in the shifts of command. Major General Curtis Le May was made a Lieutenant General and sent to Europe to command all U. S. air forces in European theaters. And Lieutenant General Nathan R. Twining was sent to take command in Alaska, primary base defending the continental United States from the north. These two men are top experts in the field of heavy bombing. They are the only two high officers in the world who have had experience in the armoring and dropping of atomic bombs. Twining's soldiers dropped the famous missiles on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

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There is no little discussion, in the diplomatic and political circles of the nation's capital, about the meaning of the abortive attempt to invade Santo Domingo from Cuban soil. On Monday, September 29, the Cuban Government announced that units of the Cuban navy had taken into custody a number of ships filled with men and materiel; and had brought them back to Cuban ports. These men, variously estimated to number from one to two thousand, formed a revolutionary expedition designed to land in the Dominican Republic and to overthrow the government of General Trujillo. They were equipped with airplanes, bazookas, LST's and other materiel obtained in the U. S.

What Washington is asking is -- how did their expedition get these arms and set sail without the State Department taking an attitude one way or another. Two months ago, the Dominican Government published full details of how the revolutionary army was training in Cuba and protested to the Cuban Government. No one doubts that the Cuban Government was fully aware of the preparations for months, despite its denials. If the Cuban Government knew, it is a certainty that the U. S. State Department was also aware of the preparations.

What attitude, therefore, did the State Department take? Some observers answer this question by pointing out that the Division of American Republic Affairs was headed by Mr. James Wright, a follower of and believer in the Braden doctrines of intervention, which had such baneful effects in the case of Argentina. Now, while Trujillo is hardly a sympathetic figure and has run a particularly ruthless dictatorship for years, he is by no means the only Latin American dictator. And the failure of the U. S. to stop export of arms is hardly in line with the good neighbor policy. In short, the whole picture of the affair is not such as to make other Latin American countries feel that Washington has dropped the Braden policy. On the contrary, the mysterious business is likely to chill the honeymoon which has lasted since the successful Rio de Janeiro Conference.

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Recovery in Western Europe is too often pictured as a process impeded by fiendish Russians and by stubborn Western Europeans who refuse to help themselves. Germany -- it cannot too often be emphasized -- is the well-spring of potential economic power, without which Europe cannot recover. Yet General Clay's short-sighted policy of continued dismantling of industrial plants suggests that we had better place some blame on ourselves. The London Economist well describes this deplorable situation: "The new Anglo-American plan for the level-of-industry in Western Germany is clearly a step away from the present policy of subsidized ruin. It revises in an upward sense almost every figure fixed at Potsdam in March, 1946. . . .

"But is the break really decisive? Or rather, is it certain that all the beneficent consequences that might flow from the new plan will, in fact, be worked out -- and worked out in time? Nobody should be deceived by the fact that the new plan is called a plan for the level of industry. . . . It is not a production program. Its purpose is simply to determine how much German plant and equipment is redundant and can be removed as reparations. The real relevance of the fact that the permitted ceiling of production in this industry or that is now raised to 85 or 90 per cent of the old pre-war level is only that the plant to be dismantled is reduced to 15 or 10 per cent. And while the 85 or 90 per cent is permissive and remote, the 15 or 10 per cent is meant to be compulsory and immediate. It is not a level-of-industry plan so much as a level of reparations plan. Moreover, there is as yet very little evidence to suggest that the statesmen, the soldiers and the administrators responsible for Germany have yet worked out how to get from the present desperate situation to the happier picture portrayed in the new plan. The full implications of restoring Germany as a viable partner in Western Europe have certainly not been squarely faced. On each of these scores trouble may lie ahead for the Allies."

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We lament the passing of the Progressive, whose able editor, Morris Rubin, has just announced suspension of the publication. Under Rubin, this weekly fought a courageous battle against sham and deceit, and sought constantly to say the things which should have been, but were not, said by other periodicals claiming the label of "liberal".

The Progressive, in our opinion, made its finest contribution just before, and during, the war when few voices were raised to criticize the truly fatal foreign policy of the Roosevelt administration. It was fitting that America's "grand old man of liberalism", Oswald Garrison Villard, should have been one of the more active contributors. And it was in the Villard tradition to give free scope to two such diverse talents as those of Henry Beston and Milton Mayer. Mr. Rubin says he hopes to resume publication later, in another format. We wish him well in his plans.

The Progressive was a "little magazine", a "small community" of free spirits, expressing different philosophies. Perhaps, therefore, the most appropriate ave atque vale appeared in its last number (October 6) in Beston's fine "Country Chronicle" column: "We are living in an age in which the various central governments of the nations are trying to bully and cozen their peoples into one great centralized community. That it can be done, socially and economically, I have no doubt whatever, but that it can be managed in terms of the human spirit seems to me very doubtful. To my mind, man is a being made for the small community. A small community gives him an identity and a human world suited to his powers; the overgrown community inevitably reduces him to a cipher, and surrounds him with a human world too vast and anonymous to deal with humanly. The primary needs of the human personality are first an identity and second a task, and it is in the small community that these needs are most likely to be fulfilled in human terms."

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Book Events

Gandhi and Stalin: Two Signs at the World's Crossroads, by Louis Fischer. New York: Harper and Brothers, $2.50. Reviewed by J. M. Lalley.

To Mr. Fischer, who has had the personal acquaintance of both, Mahatma Gandhi and Generalissimo Stalin represent the opposing courses between which the world now must choose. It is the choice, as Mr. Fischer presents it, between a spiritualized Socialism and a brutal dictatorship. The reasoning whereby he reaches this conclusion is interesting if not persuasive; and it illustrates the logical quagmires in which an honest radical may find himself when in repudiating Stalinism he strives to preserve his Marxist faith. It is evident from this book that Mr. Fischer is still obsessed with the notion that government will "wither and die" if men acquire the habit of co-operation for the common good; but he is confronted with the fact that men who have attained political or economic power are almost invariably reluctant to relinquish it.

This reluctance arises from a moral disorder which results in a perversion of values, since nobody is really the happier for being rich or powerful. Men, therefore, must cure themselves of the disease by a process of meditation and self-examination. The powerful must cultivate humility by putting themselves in the places of the weak; the mine owner for example should exchange places with the coal digger; the Labor boss with the dues paying worker; the politician with the obscure citizen; and so on. This is Mr. Fischer's application of Gandhi's principle of Satyagraha, or nonviolence, to contemporary problems. "With the Mahatma as a model, instead of money, pride, prestige and power as a spur, the citizens of a democracy could begin to smooth out the conflicts, frictions and injustices that limit the freedom and hamper the growth of individuals." In short, the way to make a better world is to be better ourselves. There is of course nothing particularly novel about this prescription; it sounds very much like one that has been urged with varying degrees of emphasis upon mankind for some thousands of years, though without much noticeable effect. What is remarkable, however, is Mr. Fischer's assumption that all who accept it will presently find themselves in favor of the Tennessee Valley Authority, the program of the British Labour Government, and the policies of what our author in a geometrical tour de force describes as "the left-of-center middle".

But apparently there is no hope of converting the Communists, and the formula of Satyagraha will not work in any totalitarian dictatorship. "A dictator would simply order Mr. Gandhi removed into oblivion. Nobody would ever hear of him again. Suppose half a million defied the dictatorship out of solidarity with Gandhi. They would be liquidated." It is necessary, therefore, to prevent a dictatorship, and to oppose the Communists at every step. The way to oppose the Communists is to oppose the reactionaries. Everything that tends to strengthen the reactionary forces in society tends also to strengthen the Communists because it permits them to raise an alarm about Fascism; conversely, every victory for the Communists, by frightening the timid liberals, strengthens the extreme Right at the expense of the Center. If it comes to a contest of Communists and Fascists it will make little difference which of them triumphs, for both suffer from the same disease of malignant nationalism. To preserve his power Stalin has forsaken the road of Marx and Lenin for that of Ivan the Terrible and Peter the Great.

And so, argues Mr. Fischer, it is not in Socialism but in nationalism that the way lies to Statism and slavery. Anything, therefore, that encourages one people or one class to regard itself above another brings us nearer the darkness. Every lynching, every "restrictive covenant" written into the deeds of an American subdivision, every limitation of the right of asylum is so much gain for Stalin.

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